THE TEXTILE MUSEUM

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19th Century Navajo Blankets on View at The Textile Museum

September 5, 2003 – March 14, 2004

August 1, 2003, Washington, DC — ***Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century: Selections from The Textile Museum Collections*** will be on view September 5, 2003 – March 14, 2004. The exhibition features 16 blankets made between 1800 and 1890 that highlight the powerful aesthetics and significant trends characteristic of 19th-century Navajo weaving. The exhibition also explores how experts today analyze Navajo blankets' materials, structures, and designs to assign dates to each textile.

Using upright frame looms and basic hand tools, Navajo weavers created colorful wool blankets that served many purposes, including use as clothing, cloaks, baby wraps, bedding, furnishings, saddle pads, and trade goods. Throughout the 19th century, Navajo weavers refined the blankets' designs and layouts as they drew inspiration from native basketry patterns and neighboring Pueblo, Mexican, and Spanish American weaving traditions. The blankets in the exhibition represent some of the most notable and dynamic styles developed – chief's-style blankets and women's-style blankets, a poncho, smaller sarapes, and wedge weave blankets.

Phase III Chief's-Style Blanket
Navajo, 19th Century
The Textile Museum 1976.30.4
Gift of Col. F.M. Johnson, Jr.

Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century is curated by Ann Lane Hedlund, director of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies at the Arizona State Museum in Tucson. The Textile Museum's presentation of the exhibition is supported by endowed funding made possible by the late Gloria F. Ross and the Gloria F. Ross Foundation.

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Navajo Blanket Styles

While the Navajo weaving tradition became established around 1650, weaving prior to 1800 is not well known. Navajo weaving of the 19th century can be divided into several distinct periods: Classic (1800 -1865); Late Classic (1865 – 1880); Transitional (1880-1895); Rug (1895 – 1950) and Modern (1950 – present). *Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century* will include examples from the Classic, Late Classic, and Transitional periods of Navajo weaving.

Six Classic and Late Classic chief's-style blankets, characterized by wide horizontal bands often overlaid with bold geometric motifs, are featured in the exhibit. The name "chief blanket" is a misnomer, as local family heads rather than chiefs governed the Navajos. Such blankets were valued as trade goods among the Plains Indians to the north and east and were often worn by high status men and women from Plains tribes. Over the course of the 19th century, the chief's style evolved through several phases, from basic stripes to elaborate layers of geometric motifs. *Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century* includes a rare first phase chief's-style blanket along with later second and third versions, and two second phase women's-style blankets.

Late classic sarape
Navajo, 19th century
The Textile Museum 86.4
Gift of Gen. Mike Sheridan

The Late Classic period of Navajo weaving was an intense time of cultural change for the Navajo people. Perhaps the most cataclysmic event of this period was Kit Carson's 1863 forced removal of the Navajo people to Bosque Redondo (Fort Sumner, New Mexico), where they were interned until 1868. Starting with the captivity at Bosque Redondo and continuing to 1879 the US government supplied the Navajos with goods, including yarn, fabric, blankets, and weaving tools. This exposure to new materials, and also to stimuli such as Spanish American and Mexican patterned blankets, influenced Navajo design and led to textiles of the Transitional period. During this time, production shifted from traditional blankets to smaller textiles and rugs with brilliant colors and designs largely intended for the trade market. Six Late Classic sarapes in the exhibition come from these turbulent times, while two wedge-weave blankets in the exhibition represent the end of the Late Classic period and Navajo weaving's entry into the Transitional period.

Studying Navajo Blankets

Changes in wool quality, yarn composition, and dyestuffs occurred frequently in Navajo weaving during the 19th century. Such dynamics inherent in the weaving materials now allow

scholars to reconstruct a more precise timeline for southwestern textile types. The late Joe Ben Wheat, former curator of anthropology at the University of Colorado Museum in Boulder, used technical analyses, chemical dye tests, and archival records in his pioneering work on southwestern blankets. Using Wheat's methods, including the scientific identification of red dyes, the exhibition *Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century* presents new research relative to dating The Textile Museum's collection. Micrographs (close-up photographs) of yarns in the exhibition's blankets illustrate the kinds of materials that allow analysts to date each textile more accurately. Charts of the dye analyses and examples of raw materials and tools will also be on display.

About the Curator

Ann Lane Hedlund is director of the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies at the Arizona State Museum in Tucson. She holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Colorado, Boulder, where she began studying with Joe Ben Wheat in 1973. Hedlund has conducted ethnographic research among contemporary Navajo weavers and historical research on southwestern textiles for thirty years. Currently a professor of anthropology at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Hedlund is author of numerous publications and recently edited the book *Blanket Weaving in the Southwest* by the late Joe Ben Wheat, which will be published by the University of Arizona Press in fall 2003.

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Founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts.

The Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the traditional societies of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art.

With a collection of over 17,000 textiles and carpets and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

For more information or images, please contact Julia Neubauer at 202-667-0441, ext. 17. The Textile Museum is a private, non-profit museum open Monday through Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Admission is free; suggested donation is $5.00.

Related Symposium

Navajo Weaving in the 19th Century: History, Materials, Design

October 10-12, 2003
The Textile Museum, Washington, DC

Held in connection with the exhibition *Navajo Blankets of the 19th Century*, this two-day symposium will explore how Navajo weaving developed its widely admired character and beauty more than a century ago. Topics will include the impact of historical events on native weaving traditions in the American Southwest, as well as the innovative ways that Navajo weavers used fibers, dyes, weaving technology, and design as means of individual and cultural expression. Speakers will include: exhibition curator **Ann Lane Hedlund**; **D.Y. Begay**, Navajo weaver and essayist in the book *Woven by the Grandmothers: Nineteenth Century Navajo Textiles from the National Museum of the American Indian*; **Nancy Blomberg**, curator of Native Arts at the Denver Art Museum; **David A. Wenger**, essayist in *Blanket Weaving in the Southwest*; and **Kathleen Whitaker**, director of the Indian Arts Research Fund at the School of American Research.

Co-sponsored by The Textile Museum, the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies at the Arizona State Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.

Fee:
$215/members of The Textile Museum, the Gloria F. Ross Center for Tapestry Studies, or the National Museum of the American Indian; $260/non-members (includes a one-year membership to The Textile Museum); $175/students with valid I.D. (includes a one-year membership to The Textile Museum)

Optional Saturday lunch: $20. Advance registration required.
For more information or to register, call (202) 667-0441, ext. 64, or visit www.textilemuseum.org/symposium.